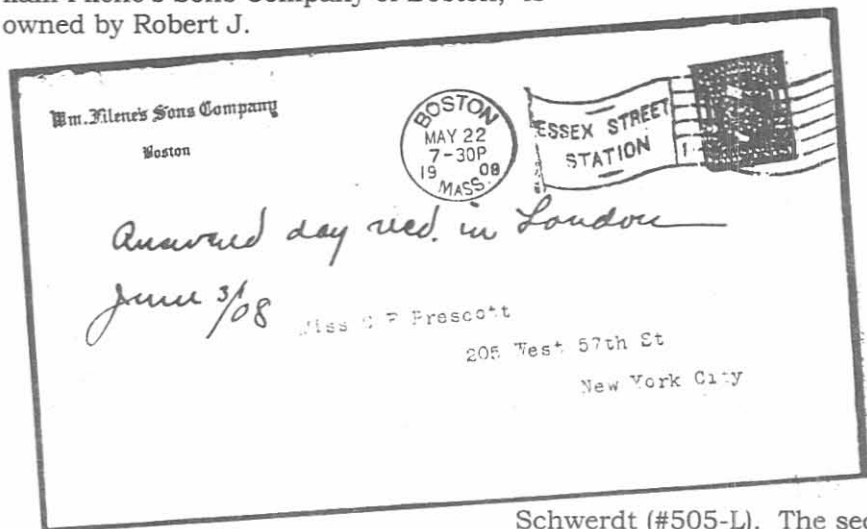


Searching for the pioneers: The 1908 & 1909 perfins users

Just when were perfins first used in the United States? Some of the early history of U.S. perfins has yet to be written, but we do know that there were at least 310 firms using perfins before the end of 1909.

The earliest known use of a U.S. perfin so far confirmed by cover is May 22, 1908. That cover, bearing pattern WFS/Co (W-91) of the William Filene's Sons Company of Boston, is owned by Robert J.



Schwerdt (#505-L). The second earliest perfin on cover, a BFC (B-110) pattern of the B. F. Cummings Company of Chicago, is postmarked May 26, 1908. That cover is owned by Paul Gault (#744).

But there are perhaps a thousand or more 1908-1909 covers in existence that identify other perfin pioneers. Richard L. Learn (#3265) has undertaken a project to list these pioneers: those who put their perforators into service during 1908 and 1909. So far he has compiled a list of 310 covers with 1908 and 1909 postmarks, but he is convinced that there are hundreds of other patterns that were used during perfins' first two years in the United States.

Perfins were authorized for use on U.S. stamps as of May 8, 1908, just over 90 years ago. So far, no covers have shown up with a May 8 date on them but one may be lurking in a collection or dealer's stock somewhere. It is also possible, suggests Schwerdt, that a perfin user may have jumped the gun and used a perfin before the first authorized date. Postal clerks would be unlikely to notice.

Learn's list is on page 124. See if you can add something to it.